Technical Author

A technical author prepares manuals and other documents for users of products and systems. Subjects covered can include scientific and technological, chemical, medical and pharmaceutical, business and commercial systems, and products or equipment for domestic use. They usually specialise in one particular field.

The Work

You could be:

- liaising with developers and managers to get an understanding of the technical aspects of the product or service
- researching the topic, analysing the needs of the user and writing documents to suit the target audience
- working with illustrators, photographers and designers
- setting out the text ready for publication, using a word processing or desktop publishing package
- liaising with printing and translation companies
- presenting information in a range of formats, such as leaflets, manuals and DVDs
- using authoring software to create online help manuals, tutorials and reference guides
- checking, updating and re-writing existing documents
- checking the proof copy before it goes to print.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary depending on:

- where you work
- the size of the company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

The starting salary for technical authors is around £22,000 - £25,000 a year. With experience this can rise to between up to £45,000 a year or more.

Freelance rates are usually in the region of £18 to £40 an hour.

You may earn more as a freelance or consultant but you will have overheads to pay.

Conditions

- You will usually be based in an office, working regular hours.
- If you are freelance, you might work alone from home but visit your clients as necessary.
- You may often have to work to tight deadlines involving evening and weekend work.

Getting In

- There is no set entry route for this career.

- Many entrants have a degree (SCQF Level 9-10), HND (SCQF Level 8) or HNC (SCQF Level 7) in a scientific, computing or engineering discipline, or other relevant subject, such as communication studies or journalism.
- Entry to a degree course requires 4-5 Highers and some subjects at National 5, normally including a pass in English. HNDs and HNCs require 1-3 Highers plus some subjects at National 5.
- Entrants without a degree usually have experience in a relevant field.

What Does It Take

You need to have:

- an analytical approach
- research skills
- an accurate and methodical approach
- specialist or wide knowledge of your subject area
- the necessary self-discipline to work alone
- good IT skills and knowledge of authoring software.

You need to be able to:

- work to deadlines
- simplify language and explain technical terms
- write in different styles
- work alone and in a team with other professionals.

Training

- Most entrants have relevant experience or qualifications, and training is usually on the job.
- The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC) lists accredited training courses on their website.

Getting On

- There are limited opportunities for promotion, except occasionally to editorial and managerial positions within the publication departments of big companies.
- Some of the work is freelance and part time.
- There may be opportunities to move into publishing, specialising in the fields of science or technology.

More Information

Technical writers are employed by organisations in a range of sectors, including central government, defence, finance, information technology, manufacturing and medicine.
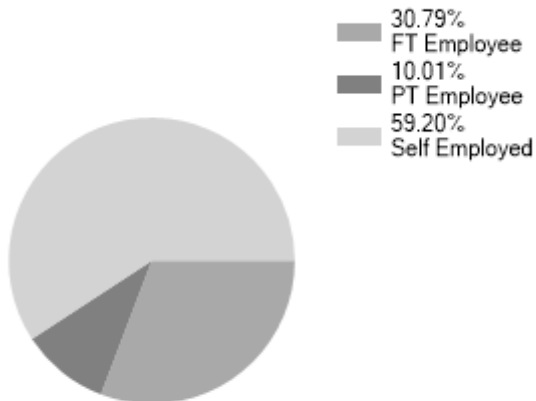
Contacts

Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators (ISTC)
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Statistics

Employment Status UK %

30.79%
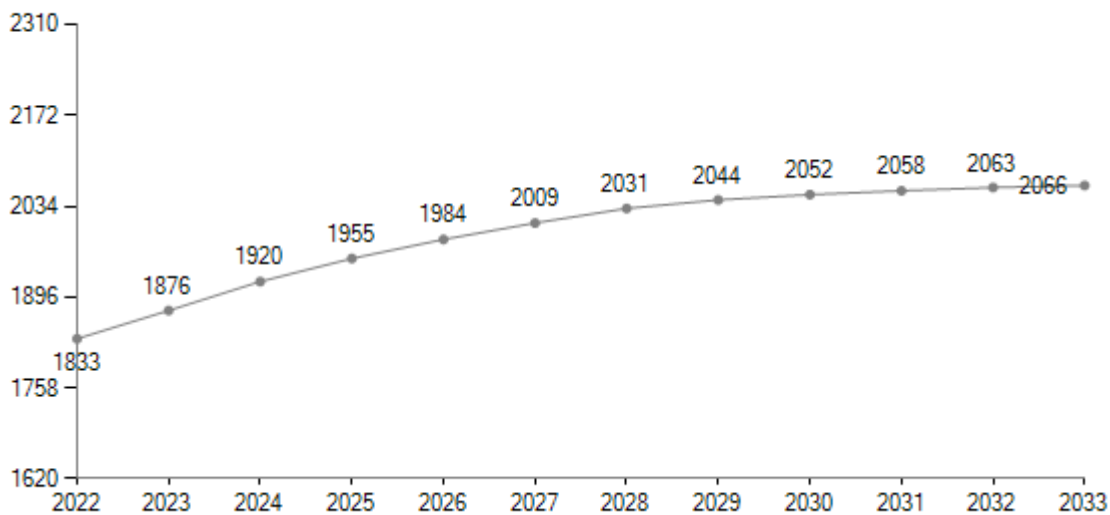FT Employee
10.01%
PT Employee
59.20%
Self Employed

Past Unemployment - Scotland

No Claimant statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by LMI for All

Predicted Employment in Scotland

LMI data powered by Lightcast